

SENATE AIDES MAP ARMS FUNDS FIGHT

Group Shaping Arguments for an Expanded Attack on Defense Budget

By JOHN W. FINNEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 23 — Behind the closed doors of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing room, an unpublicized meeting took place today that could shape the outcome of the impending Senate battle over the defense budget.

For more than two hours, the administrative aides and legislative assistants to some 30 Senators, Republican and Democrats, sat around the long mahogany witness table, discussing military and political strategy.

The ostensible purpose of the meeting was to prepare for the next round in the missile defense debate, which is now moving from several weeks of scientific argument before Senate subcommittees to political argument on the Senate floor.

But out of the meeting be-

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gan to shape a political organization for going beyond the missile defense issue to an attack on the defense budget as a whole.

Young, Unknown Faces

At least outwardly, the group seemed to carry little political weight, certainly not enough to challenge the Pentagon and the well-entrenched military establishment in the Senate. Not a single Senator was present.

Most of the participants were under 40 years old. Many were lawyers. Others were former diplomats who had resigned from the Foreign Service. But as a group they would be unknown faces to the senior Senators on the Armed Services or Appropriations Committees or to the lobbyists of the White House or Pentagon.

But in the impending battle over the defense budget it is these aides who will shape the arguments and do the basic homework on amendments to strike various items from the defense bills.

In some ways the Senate operates like a big Wall Street law firm. The Senators are the senior partners who lay down the guidelines and argue the case on the floor. But the aides are the junior partners or clerks who prepare the case.

And that is precisely what the bipartisan group of aides is now trying to do in the Defense debate — prepare detailed briefs for their Senators to use in questioning and perhaps cutting various items in the \$80-billion military budget.

In the long run, these briefs are likely to have a greater effect than all the hearings and all the analyses of the defense budget that are being offered by various groups in Congress.

With his forthcoming hearings by the Joint Economic Committee on "the military budget and national economic priorities," Senator William Proxmire, Democrat of Wisconsin, may be able to provide the publicity and perhaps some of the political rationale necessary for cutting the defense budget.

Similarly, the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Foreign Commitments, headed by Senator Stuart Symington, Democrat of Missouri, may be able to provide some illustrative examples of how certain foreign military spending may be cut. The subcommittee staff believes that, in a recent trip to Europe, it pinpointed some military bases that have outlived their original purpose and usefulness.

But gradually the realization developed among a group of moderate and liberal Senators that, if they were to stand up to the military establishment on the Senate floor, they would have to be far better organized and prepared than they have been in past unsuccessful forays against the defense budget.

In many ways this realization, as well as the informal organization of Senatorial aides has grown out of the success of a bipartisan coalition in challenging the Nixon Administration's decision to deploy the Safeguard missile defense system.

Measure of Success

In that fight, the aides, working through their Senators, have demonstrated that they can put the once powerful Senate military establishment on the defensive. Now they are attempting to apply the same tactics to the defense budget.

One measure of their success in the Safeguard fight is the way the Congressional leadership is attempting to postpone a showdown on the House and Senate floors.

Speaker John W. McCormack has decided that he will not force the issue in the House but rather let the Senate act first on the military procurement bill that contains authorization for deploying the Safeguard system.

In the Senate, where the outlook is still uncertain, Senator John Stennis, Democrat of Mississippi, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, is no longer pushing to get the legislation to the Senate floor.

The prospect now is that Senator Stennis will delay until July, hoping that in the meantime the White House can regroup and strengthen the pro-Safeguard ranks in the Senate.

But as the aides saw it today, the delay also means they will have a chance to prepare a series of speeches for their Senators setting forth the case against the Safeguard system.